

he wrote that he was supported by a Prince
and that wasn't the first one
and how he lived in a thatched hut
with boys and goats
under a sometimes active volcano
he smoked exotic dope night and day
he spoke seven languages
he was on speaking terms with major editors & publishers
they were in England, Italy and America
he had stayed in that famous Paris hotel
(his poems had those startling breaking lines
my lines just went from corner to corner)

he sent a half dozen photos of himself (dated)
he had been to many brave places
he was smiling in fur hats
he had natty open shirts with chains
he had a drooping intellectual mustache

I wrote back that I had puked that night
I had mixed vodka with gin
I wondered if my woman was coming back

I finally gave up on the correspondence
I told him that I couldn't go on anymore

oh
he wrote back
so you quit
I out-wrote you so you quit
you didn't want it known that I could out-write you

you are the best
I wrote back
you are a Prince

I don't know if I believed that
he must have
he never complained about our broken correspondence again.

THE BIG BENEFIT READING

I had gotten sucked into reading with this
group and found out that we were reading

to save some political prisoners in some
oppressed state

and so when I got up I told them that I
wasn't reading to save anybody but
myself.

and some of the dainty souls out there
hurled some dainty invectives at me

and I read my crap and got off
stage

and since the promoter had promised me
\$\$\$\$ ("after the show, Chinaski, you'll
get yours," he had told me) so I sat in
the audience and waited

I sat with an acquaintance
a Jewish homosexual exile from Crete

and there was a poet up there reading and
that poet finished his long poem

and my Crete acquaintance asked me during
the applause: "what happened to the
mother?"

"what mother?" I asked.

"almost all the poem was about his mother
and then -- she simply vanished," he told
me

"I can't blame her," I told him

meanwhile

it was a stinking wasted night

they all got up there and it was difficult
to tell whether the poets or the audience were
closer to utter lifelessness

I finally got the promoter backstage afterwards and
demanded my \$\$\$\$ as promised

and he told me, "listen, there were many better poets
here tonight than you and they all donated their time."

"and I'm going to donate your ass if you don't follow
through on your word!"

and I reached out and ripped all the buttons from the
front of his shirt

and he said, "all right, all right, take it easy!"
and pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and slipped
me a few

I jammed that into my pocket and got out of there
some months later it was learned that the promoter
had never forwarded the funds to said oppressed

political prisoners of said political state
which figured to me because I
didn't like his face or the way he combed his
hair
and I didn't like his English accent
nor did I like his slack-jawed
lemon-faced girlfriend who kept accusing me of
treachery "against the peoples of the world who
are fighting for the peoples of the world."

I've never read with a group again for any
reason
which is the best reason
of them all.

SICK

I had this night job and I'd sit in the bed
looking out the window in the late afternoon
the last of the sun would come into the room
through the leaves of this large bush
and when I thought about what was out there
waiting, I'd reach for the telephone.

the office clerk knew my voice:

"yes, Chinaski, what is it this time?"

"just write something down," I'd tell him,

"common cold, flu, the clap"

I'd hang up.

it was good watching it slowly get dark
listening to people coming home
parking their cars, turning on their TVs
making kitchen sounds, talking.

then I'd get up and drink four or five hours
alone,

then go back to bed and sleep.

and the next night at the factory everybody
would be very small and wrinkled
and I'd walk in tall and shining
all eyes and coolness,
secretly assured;

the men didn't understand and the girls
all loved me, and the foreman came forward
to speak to me of absenteeism
as I took out a cigarette, lit it and
listened.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA